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Use of social media in the member libraries of the Business Librarians Association



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INTRODUCTION

The Business Librarians Association (BLA) undertakes a biannual benchmarking survey in order to compile a picture of academic business librarians and the services offered in their libraries. The latest survey, conducted over the summer of 2009, included a section on the use of social media by business librarians. This section focused specifically on Twitter, Facebook and blogs, the main question being whether they were used personally or professionally.

There were no questions in this survey about the use of social media in the member libraries but many respondents used the comments fields to describe how their libraries were using social media. As a result of this the BLA committee decided to conduct a full survey on the use of social media by the member libraries, the aim being to identify what tools are used, for what purpose and who is driving the implementation. This article provides an overview of the methodology and key findings of the survey.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the aims of the survey, the questions were devised to fit into four groups: 'about you', 'use of general web 2.0 tools', 'use of specific web 2.0 tools' and 'final comments'. The first section was aimed at finding out about the respondents and their own involvement in the use of web 2.0 in their library. Of particular interest was whether

age or management responsibility had an impact on this involvement. For the two sections on the use of web 2.0 tools the *Tools directory* of the Centre for Learning and Performance Technologies was used to identify both broad categories of tool and specific sites and services.¹ The first three sections were designed to retrieve quantitative data so the final comments section was included to give respondents an opportunity to provide qualitative feedback.

The survey was constructed online using the forms feature of Google Docs and the link was sent to BLA members via the lis-business e-mail list. The survey was open for one month, between 15 December 2009 and 15 January 2010. Of the 214 subscribers to the mail list, 68 completed the survey, giving a response rate of 32%.

KEY FINDINGS

About the respondents

When asked 'What is your involvement in the use of web 2.0 in your library?', the majority of respondents (40%) said they were contributors to their library's web 2.0 services. Only 6% had no involvement at all.

In response to a question about management responsibility, 39% said they had no management responsibilities in their current job, 44% had responsibility for staff as either supervisors or line managers, but only 13% were members of a senior management group. Of the 15 respondents who said they were the instigators of the use of web 2.0 tools in their library, 5 were line managers, 4 were supervisors, 2 were members of the senior management group and 3 had no management responsibility (see Figure 1).

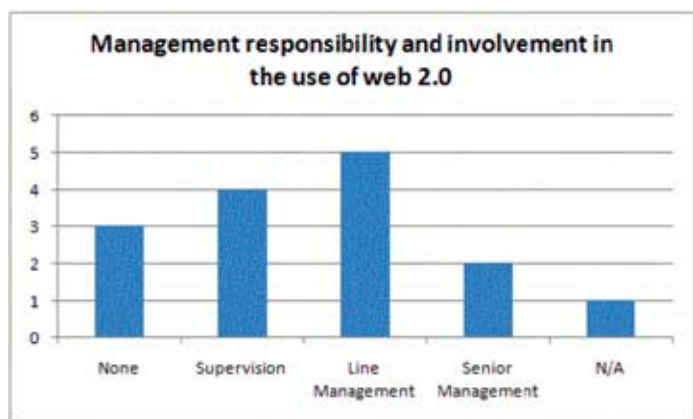


Figure 1.

There is a general perception that the use of web 2.0 tools is driven primarily by younger age

groups. Therefore it was decided to ask respondents to identify which age range they were in, to see if the same is true for the BLA community. Of the 15 respondents who said they were the instigators of the use of web 2.0 tools in their library, 5 were in the age range 25–34, 5 were between 35 and 44, 4 between 45 and 54 and 1 chose not to disclose an age (see Figure 2).

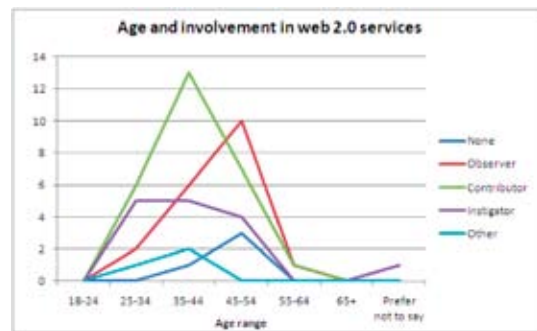


Figure 2.

About the use of general web 2.0 tools

This section of the survey asked questions about the use of general web 2.0 tools in the respondents' libraries. For the purpose of this section eight broad types of web 2.0 sites and services were identified, which were: blogs, instant messaging services, micro-blogs, multimedia sharing sites, social bookmarking services, social networking sites, start pages and wikis.

Blogs were by far the most popular of the web 2.0 services identified by this survey, with 75% of respondents using them in their libraries. Coming in second was the relatively new phenomenon of micro-blogging, on 47%. The least used were start pages (4%) and instant messaging (7%).

Having identified the types of service being used, a follow-up question asked what the primary purpose for their use was. This asked respondents to choose from five possible answers: comment and feedback, enquiry services, internal communications, news and events and publicity (see Figure 3).

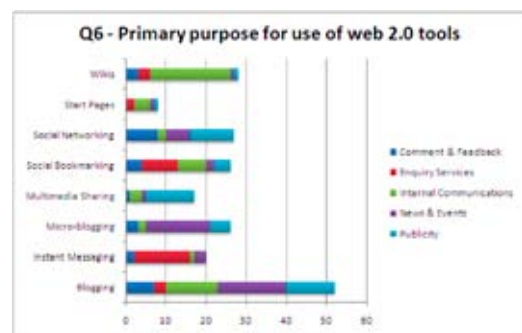


Figure 3.

When asked where the initiative came from to start using web 2.0 tools in their library, the majority of respondents (39%) said that the initiative to use web 2.0 tools came from one member of staff with an interest in web 2.0. Only 3% said it was a university-wide initiative and just 8% said it came from the senior management group.

About the use of specific web 2.0 tools

In this section respondents were asked to identify which specific web 2.0 services they used in each of the categories identified for the questions on general web 2.0 tools. In the respondents' libraries:

- Blogger was the favoured blogging platform.
- Meebo was the most commonly used instant messaging software.
- The only micro-blogging site used was Twitter.
- The multimedia sharing site most often used was YouTube.
- Delicious was the most commonly used social bookmarking site.
- The main social networking site used was Facebook.
- Netvibes was most often used to create start pages.
- The most commonly used wiki software was PBWorks.

Final comments

The final two questions on the survey allowed respondents to share their views on the success of the web 2.0 services their libraries were using and add any general comments they had on the use of web 2.0 in libraries.

A common theme among the answers to the question on success stories was how the use of web 2.0 tools raised the profile of the library among both staff and students. For students, the library having a presence on social networking sites such as Facebook provides a quick access point to library resources. For staff, the library's use of web 2.0 tools identifies library staff as experts in this area and therefore their skills are used accordingly.

Despite raising awareness of the library and its services through the use of web 2.0 tools, a lot of respondents felt that one element that hadn't worked so well was the opportunity for comment and feedback. Even though fans and followers were increasing, there was little interaction or contribution from library users.

The final question – which asked for any additional comments on the use of web 2.0 – was used by many respondents to express their concerns. Chief among these were a drain on staff time and duplication of content across multiple sites. The issue of duplication of content was addressed by other respondents who recognised that there is no one-size-fits-all service and therefore the use of multiple web 2.0 tools can help the library to reach users in a way that best suits the users' needs and preferences.

Many respondents said that their libraries were still experimenting with different web 2.0 tools and were learning as they went along. While a couple of respondents highlighted the *ad hoc* nature of developing new services using social media, many more identified the need to develop a strategy rather than jump straight in.

CONCLUSION

The social media survey has been a very helpful exercise for identifying the current state of the use of web 2.0 tools among the member libraries of the BLA. The results have been used by the BLA committee to guide the development of a social media workshop for BLA members. The first of these workshops ran at Cass Business School on Wednesday 17 March 2010. It covered key themes identified in the survey, including the planning, purpose and practice of implementing a service using social media. A second workshop was to run at Northumbria University on Friday 16 April. It is hoped that BLA members will be able to use this survey, and the materials from the workshops, when developing a strategy for the introduction of new web 2.0 services.

REFERENCE

- 1 Centre for Learning & Performance Technologies, *Tools directory 2010*, available at <http://www.c4lpt.co.uk/Directory/index.html> [accessed 24 March 2010]